**Common Key Words Used in Essay Questions**

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| Compare | When you are asked to compare, you should examine qualities or characteristics, in order to discover resemblances. The term compare is usually stated as compare with, and it implies that you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned. |
| Contrast | When you are instructed to contrast, you should stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of associated things, qualities, events, or problems. |
| Criticize | In a criticism, you should express your judgment with respect to the correctness or merit of the factors under consideration. You are expected to give the results of your own analysis and to discuss both limitations and good points. |
| Define | Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. In such statements, details are seldom required, but boundaries or limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which the item to be defined belongs, and whatever differentiated it from all other classes. |
| Diagram | In a question which specifies a diagram, you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or other graphic representation in your answer. Generally, the student is also expected to label the diagram and in some cases to add a brief explanation or description of it. |
| Discuss | The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and detailed answer. |
| Enumerate | The word enumerate specifies a list of outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required. |
| Evaluate | In an evaluation question, you are expected to present a careful appraisal stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal. |
| Explain | In explanatory answers, it is imperative that you clarify, elucidate, and interpret the material you present. In such an answer, it is best to state the “how” and “why,” reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining. |
| Illustrate | A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, diagram, or concrete example. |
| Interpret | An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem. |
| Justify | When you are instructed to justify your answer, you must prove, or show grounds for, decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form. |
| List | Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or a tabulation. Such answers should always be concise. |
| Outline | An outline answer is organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omit minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification. |
| Prove | A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions, you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence, or by logical reasoning, with sufficient examples. |
| Relate | In a question which asks you to show the relationship or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations, usually in descriptive form. |
| Review | A review usually specifies a critical examination. You should analyze and comment briefly, in organized sequence, upon major points of the problem. Sometimes, however, a review question simply asks for a list. |
| State | In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear form. Details and examples may be omitted. |
| Summarize | When you are asked to summarize or present a summary, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, clear form. Details and examples may be omitted. |
| Trace | When a question asks you to trace a course of events, you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such questions may call for probing or for deductions. |